

THE CREATION PERIOD

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"workers" (*wanaras*), it would be their duty to cut the burial poles, *udinis*, make and paint the large ceremonial baskets, *wanawana*, and the elaborate *putamuni* spears, *nakarings*, as well as to clear the burial ground at Tapararimi, which was east of Impanali, the place where *Purukupali* died. As *Purukupali* had entered the sea and was drowned, there was no grave to cover and keep clean, as there would be at a usual *putamuni*. 773

The "working party", who cut the poles with stone axes, consisted of the men, *Anjakui* (fresh water), *Wuriuprinili* (fire), *Tukimbini* (honey-eater), *Jideti* (saw-fish), *Timalane* (mosquito), *Taduwa* (shark) and *Pukjerapi* (mullet). Two turtle women, *Garagalani* and *Rings* made some of the large *putamuni* baskets, and a honey woman, *Latungkala*, who was not one of the "workers", another basket, which was decorated by the honey-men, *Putuki* and *Kajupini*.

While the "working party" were busy at their tasks, *Talinini*, the honey-man of Bathurst Island, sent specially carved message sticks, *purunkia* (Fig. 17, c, h) to the various groups of men and women on Bathurst and Melville Islands, instructing them to assemble at certain places, then move eastward to Tapararimi, performing the *ilania* ceremonies²⁰ on the way. [211] [532]*

A bark painting, PL 34, 2, deals with the assembling of the people for *Purukupali's putamuni*. 532* 773

The black disc, *d*, at the bottom of the painting, is *Bia-wururu*, central Bathurst Island, where the leader, the honey-man, *Talinini*, with *Mauwini* and *Taparalili* performed the first *ilania* ceremony. *Pintamu*, *g*, is the home of *Talinini* and *Putawini*, *h*, that of *Mauwini*.

The second *ilania* was performed at *Rarukumpili*, *e* (western Bathurst Island). A fish-man, *Pulungarai*, a participant of this ceremony, lived on an adjacent point of land, *f*. The "workers" from the east coast also performed *ilanias* at *Ininu*, *j*, central Melville Island,²¹ as well as at three localities on the east coast, i.e., *Wuriupi*, *i*, *Muruplana*, *m*, and *Tapararimi*, *n*.

The central disc, *k*, is *Tapararimi*, where the creation people, from all parts of the Islands, assembled to perform the final *putamuni* rituals of *Purukupali*.

The many lines, *a*, *a*, at the top and bottom of the painting, symbolize the routes of the ancestral men as they walked to *Tapararimi*, and *b*, *b*, paths taken by the women, who always travel to a *putamuni* ceremony by a different route from that of the men.

²⁰ The *ilanias* are performed every evening for some weeks before the final *putamuni* rituals (p. 46).

²¹ Another account places this *ilania* at *Puntubu*.

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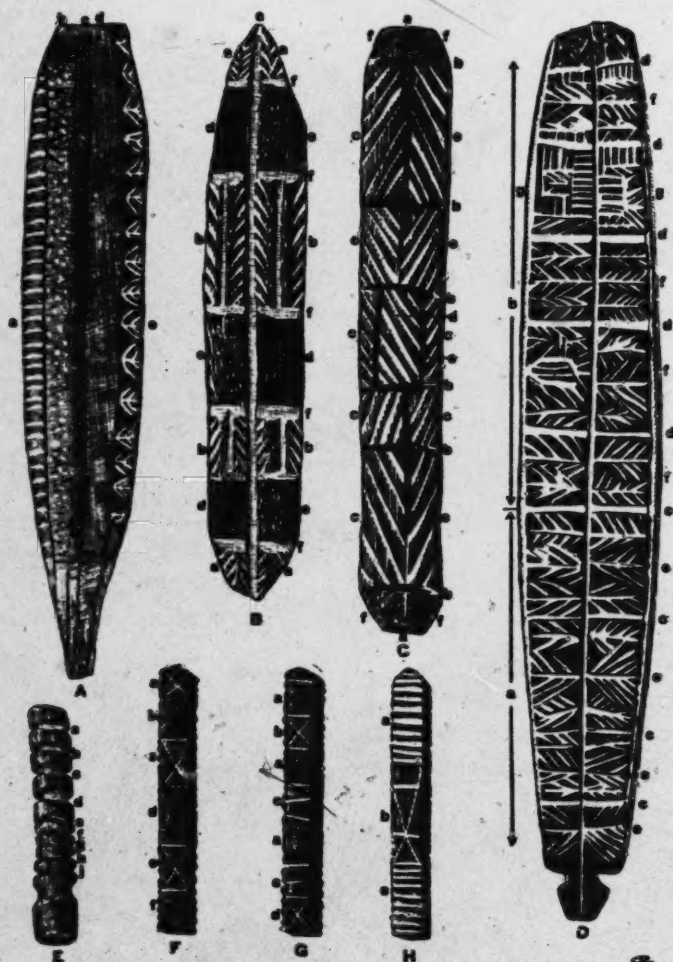


FIG. 1. *The Message Sticks*

A, Numanira; B, Puntubu; C, Muranapi; D, Pirilou; E, Secular; F, G, H, Pukamuni Ceremonial.

202 *palmasjini*, and cane armlets, *jairinis*. Then, taking a female *pukamuni* spear,
765 *suntaguni*, in his hand he seated himself within sight of the camp.

[301] The local aborigines went out to welcome him, but on seeing the message
[302] stick and hearing the news, they mourned hysterically, cutting their heads
[785] and beating themselves with sticks.

When the mourning died down, the aborigines gave the messenger a meal,
[574] after which he returned to his own camp.

Although the general distribution of the totemic *purunkita* has been dis-
[126] continued in recent years, the aborigines who knew them well, made nine
[184] examples for me. It would seem that each totemic place had its own particular
[794] design, for when I showed the *purunkita* (Fig. 7D) to old *Tjamalampua* and
Malumerinina, neither of whom had seen it previously, they recognized it
immediately as a message stick which would have been sent to the *Mudung-
kala* totemic group of Buchanan Island, at the southern entrance to Apsley
Straits. However, other *purunkitas*, i.e. (Fig. 5C; Fig. 5F, G, H; and Fig.
6A, B) are still being used in the *pukamuni* rituals.

During the early days of our stay, when the *ilanias* of *Waniamperi's*
pukamuni were about to start, three men, two of them, *Marawani* and
Uramajina, being the chief mourners, made a journey to the Bathurst Island
people for the purpose of giving them a *purunkita* and telling them the news.

A few days later a Bathurst Island man returned with the message stick,
Fig. 5F, G, H, and verbal instructions relating to the forthcoming burial rituals.

[126] Although I did not see the message stick which *Marawani* and his com-
panions carried to Bathurst Island, I was able to make a rubbing of another
(Fig. 7C), which was sent to the same locality on the death of *Pulanibwui's*
wife.

Later, old *Tjamalampua* sent another message stick (Fig. 7A, B), to the
men of the *Mudungkala* totem of Buchanan Island, asking for European
goods and food to pay the "workers" at the final rituals of *Waniamperi's*
pukamuni.

Notification of Death

202 The designs on message stick, Fig. 7C, which an aboriginal carried to the
● 211 Bathurst Island people, together with the news of the death of *Nulatinini*, did
x 532 not, in any way, refer to the message that accompanied it, but to topographi-
cal details along the motor road between Snake Bay and Cockle Point on
Apsley Straits.

The upper section, *a*, is the aboriginal camp at Snake Bay, and the indenta-
tions, *a*, *a*, are the rocks on its shores. The cross-hatched rectangle in the

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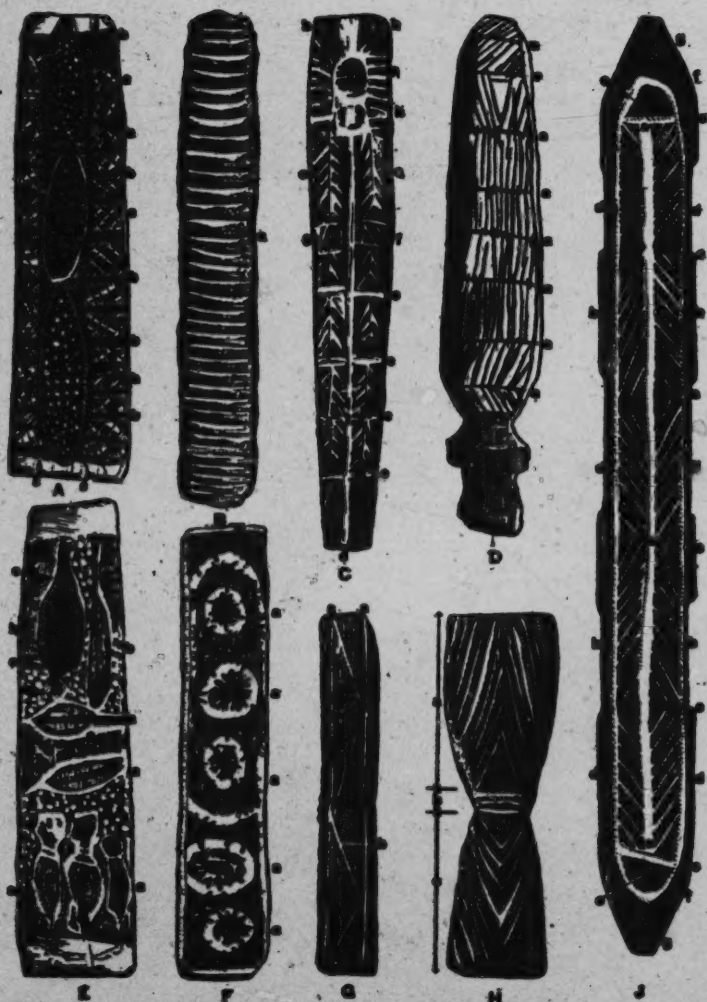


FIG. 6. *The Massage Sticks*

A, B, Imila; C, Ceremonial; D, Wunipi; E, Secular; F, Kuchatampi; G, H, Invitation to Secular Ceremony; I, Maratapi.

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centre of the message stick is the freshwater creek, Primblamili, across which there is a crude bridge of logs (parallel lines *e, f*, on either side of the cross-hatched rectangle).

The long rectangle at the top of the message stick is the track between Snake Bay and Primblamili Creek, and that at the bottom, from Primblamili Creek to Cockle Point on Apeley Straits. Symbols *Δ, Δ*, are living stringybark trees by the roadside, and *c* is a group of dead trees.

The crossed squares *Δ, Δ*, indicate trees that had been cut down to clear a motor road between Snake Bay and Cockle Point. Apeley Strait, indicated by rectangle *g*, was crossed by the messenger in the dug-out canoe, *j*. The triangles at *n*, refer to the houses of the Bathurst Island Mission Station.

Pukamuni Ceremonial Purunkita

The return *purunkita* to that notifying the death of *Waniamperi* is shown on Fig. 5F, O, H. A messenger carried this *purunkita* to the Melville Island aborigines, together with the instructions about the conduct of the *pukamuni* from *Jibunglialumi*, the leader of the Bathurst Island group.

On side F, the crossed square, *a*, refers to *Urumatjina*, *c*, to *Marawani*, and *s*, to *Katopi*, the three chief mourners at the *pukamuni* of *Waniamperi*. *Katopi* is the son of the dead man.

Square *b* refers to instructions asking the "workers" to build a screen of boughs round the grave so that unauthorized people cannot see it; *d* refers to the cleaning of the grave site, and *f* to a request for the "workers" to dig out the roots and sticks in the ceremonial ground, so that the dancers will not injure their feet.

On side G, the crossed square *d*, is the *milimika* of the Bathurst Island group, and *b*, that of the Melville Island people. Groups of lines, *c, c*, refer to the number of "working men" to be appointed, while cross-hatched areas, *a, a*, indicate a request to the "workers" to do their tasks well and happily.

On side H, the lines, *a*, refer to burial poles to be erected around *Waniamperi's* grave; *b*, to the chief *pukamuni* men at Melville Island, and *c*, to the Bathurst *pukamuni* men whom *Jibunglialumi* will bring with him.

Pukamuni Ceremonial Purunkita

Fig. 6a is a *purunkita* sent by an old man, *Tjamalampua*, to another old man, *Tipumbriaria*, in Bathurst Island, asking him to bring many aborigines to the forthcoming *pukamuni* ceremony at Melville Island. The cross-lines, *a*, indicate the required number of men.

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Kudjatumpi

This *purunkia* (Fig. 6b) was sent to the March-fly totemic centre at Kudjatumpi, southern Melville Island. The designs on the message stick were painted, instead of being engraved, because of the difficulty of cutting the circular patterns.

The white circles and ovals, *a, a*, are backwaters and lagoons at the mouth of the freshwater stream at Kudjatumpi and the star-shaped designs, lilies growing on the surface of the water.

Wuriupi

Fig. 6c is an engraved message stick sent to members of the fire totemic group at Wuriupi, eastern Melville Island.

The disc, *a*, indicates the sun-woman, *Wuriupranala*, travelling across the sky, the radiating lines, *b*, the beams of light at sunrise, *f* and *g*, the mid-day camps of the sun-woman (p. 172). The long line, *d*, is the path of the sun-woman across the firmament.

Pandanus trees in the Milky Way are indicated at *c, c*, and similar designs and breaks in the galaxy by the transverse lines, *e, e*.

Numanira

The *purunkia* (Fig. 5A) belonged to the totemic red-ochre group at Numanira, west of Karlslake Island.

The left-hand band of short transverse bars at *a*, represents the lines of coloured ochres in the sands of the sea-shore; the dots on the next band, *b*, to the right, are the oysters on the rocks at Numanira; band *c* indicates the reefs of red and yellow ochres covered at high tide; *d* is the motor road along the cliff on the mainland opposite Karlslake Island, and *e*, the trees on the shore of Karlslake Island, opposite Numanira.

Puntubu

Fig. 5b illustrates a *purunkia* which was sent to Puntubu, on the upper reaches of the Tjipripu River, central Melville Island, one of the totem places of the eucalyptus-tree woman, *Aragoutourina*.

The central line, *c*, is the Tjipripu River, which flows into Curtis Haven. On the banks of that river grow many *tulini* palms (symbols *b, b, b*) from which the aborigines make their palm-leaf baskets. The roots of the palms, *a, a*, are indicated at either end of the message stick, and reefs of black and yellow rocks on the banks of the Tjipripu River at *d, d*, and *e, e, e*.

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202 respectively. The junctions of those rocks are indicated by the transverse
 211 lines, *f, f, f*.
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Muranapi

A message stick to invite the aborigines of Muranapi, southern Melville Island, to a *pubamuni*, is illustrated on Fig. 6j.

The central white line is Muranapi Creek; the groups of sloping lines on either side are the eucalyptus trees on its banks, and the transverse panels, such as *c, c*, pandanus trees on the subsidiary watercourses.

The semi-circles, *s, s*, on either end of the *purunkisa*, represent the hills, *g, g*, the high ground, *f, f*, the sandy soil on the shores of Muranapi Creek, and the indentations, *d, d*, etc., on either edge of the *purunkisa*, the *tulini* palms which grow on the edge of the fresh water.

Muranapi

Fig. 5c is another message stick sent to Muranapi, this time to the *Mandubuka* (blow-fly) totemic group.

The central lines, *a, a*, at both ends of the *purunkisa* represent the salt-water creek, Duniau. On this creek is the totemic place, *d*, a rock about thirty feet long and six feet above the level of high tide. The transverse lines, *b, b*, etc., are freshwater creeks which flow into Duniau.

The sloping cuts within rectangle *d*, symbolize cracks in the totemic rock of *Mandubuka*. The remainder of the sloping cuts, as at *c, c*, etc., represent bloodwood trees and other eucalypts growing on the banks of the freshwater streams. Marks *f, f*, etc., on either end of the *purunkisa*, indicate a point of land at the mouth of Duniau Creek.

Pirilou

Fig. 5d illustrates a message stick sent to the catfish totemic group of Pirilou on the Goose Creek swamps, central Melville Island.

The middle line is the Goose Creek, *a* (lower) being the salt-water section, and *b* (upper), the fresh-water. The transverse lines, *c, c*, etc., are subsidiary mangrove creeks, and *d, d*, etc., the freshwater lagoons or backwaters of the Goose Creek swamps. At *s, s*, etc., are mangrove trees on the shore of the salt-water stream, *a*; and *f, f*, etc., living paper-bark, and *g, g*, dead paper-bark trees in the freshwater lagoons.

Imilu and Buchanan Island

A *purunkisa* (Fig. 6A, 2), partly engraved, partly painted, was taken from Snake Bay first to the aborigines at Imilu, north-western Melville Island,

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then to a group on Buchanan Island, notifying them of the forthcoming burial rituals.

The three large ovals on Fig. 5A are graves on Melville Island, the short transverse lines, *b, b*, the *pukamuni* poles, and the short lines, *c, c*, at the bottom of the *purankita*, the tracks leading to the grave. The cross-hatched panels, *a, a*, represent the grass around the grave site.

On the opposite side, Fig. 5B, the designs, *a, a*, are *pukamuni* poles, and *b, b*, old graves surrounded by poles (short lines, *c, c*). The dots represent the mourners at the grave.

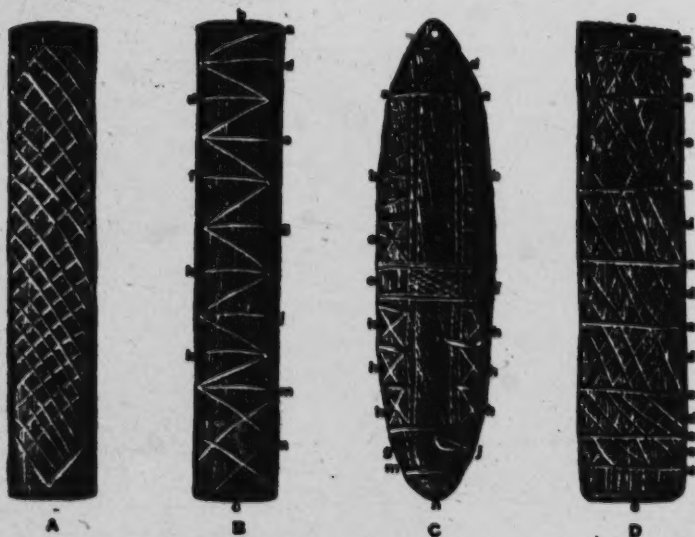


FIG. 7. The Message Sticks

A, B, Buchanan Island; C, Notification of Death; D, Buchanan Island.

Buchanan Island

Fig. 7A, B, are two sides of another *purankita*, which was sent to the *Mudung-kali* (eucalyptus tree) totemic group on Buchanan Island (adjacent to the Bathurst Island Mission Station). This *purankita* asked for a supply of European goods and food so that the "workers" could be paid at the closing rituals of *Waniamperi's pukamuni* on Melville Island.

The diamond patterns on Fig. 7A refer to the numbers of men in large the

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Mudangkala totemic group. On the reverse side (Fig. 7a), the zig-zag line *a*, is the road between Snake Bay (upper end, *b*), and Cockle Point, in Apeley Straits (lower end, *c*). At *d*, *d*, is a request for two six-pound bags of sugar; *e*, for tea; *f*, sufficient printed calico for a loin cloth; *g*, three sticks of tobacco; *h*, a tin of tobacco; *j*, a pair of trousers; *k*, a pocket knife, and *m*, a pipe. The crossed lines at *n* indicate the camp of *Tjamalumpua*, the sender of the message stick.

Buchanan Island

The message stick (Fig. 7b) refers to the Jaulama jungle, about a half a mile south of our camp.

This stick was sent by the chief mourner of the Melville Island *pukamuni* group to the members of the ironwood, *Mudangkala*, totemic group of Buchanan Island, and adjacent Bathurst Islanders, notifying them of the oncoming burial rituals. The designs on the stick, however, have no relationship to either the ironwood tree group or the message they would receive. The short vertical lines at *c*, *c*, are living paper-bark trees, and the transverse lines, *a*, *a*, dead paper-bark trees in the Jaulama jungle. At *b*, are the roots of the trees, and at panels *e*, the vines of the edible *roko* yams on the branches of the paper-barks. The four panels, *d*, *d*, etc., are jungle trees, and *e* indicates their roots.

Invitation to Adjoining Tribes

[574] Fig. 6a, n, illustrates a message stick (not associated with a *pukamuni* ceremony) from the Melville Island people, inviting the aborigines on the Coburg Peninsula to pay them a visit and to perform some of their mainland ceremonies.⁹⁷

On the obverse side, Fig. 6a, the parallel lines, *a*, *a*, symbolize the shores of the Coburg Peninsula, and the zig-zag line, *b*, a mangrove creek in the same locality.

On the reverse side, 6n, the V-shaped patterns, *a*, indicate the men who have been invited from the Coburg Peninsula, and those in the lower section, *b*, the women. The short transverse lines at *c*, represent the Melville Island men who will act as hosts to the visitors.

Secular

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Fig. 3x is a secular message stick sent to an aboriginal, *Marawani*, who was on a visit to Darwin, asking him to bring back the following goods; *a*,

⁹⁷ This message stick suggests that, at the present time, members of the mainland tribes and those of the Tiwi, occasionally visit each other.

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tobacco, *b*, matches, *c*, a pipe, *d*, a calico loin cloth, *e*, a pair of short trousers, *f*, a shirt, *g*, sugar, *h*, tea, and *i*, flour.

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Secular

Fig. 60 is a carved stick whose designs were thought out by the artist as he walked along the sandy beach near our camp. Although not a message stick, the illustration is included in the section as an example of how an aboriginal expresses his mental images through the medium of simple wood carving.

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The horizontal lines, *a*, *a*, symbolize the waves breaking on the beach, and the groups of short lines, a pattern of shallow gutters which had been formed on the sandy shore by the fresh water seeping from a nearby lagoon.

10. THE BURIAL POLES

The painted and decorated poles of Melville and Bathurst Islands attracted the attention of all the early visitors. Sir Gordon Bremer in 1824, possibly the first European to see the *pukamuni* poles, when writing about a grave he saw on Melville Island, states: "The situation was one of such perfect retirement and repose that it displayed considerable feeling in the survivors who placed it there and the simple order which pervaded the spot would not have disgraced a civilised people. It was an oblong square open at the foot, the remaining end and sides being railed around with trees, 7 feet to 8 feet high, some of which were carved with stone or shell and further ornamented by rings of wood. On the tops of these were placed the waddies (throwing sticks) of the deceased. The grave was raised above the level of the earth, but the raised part was not more than 3 feet long. At the head was placed a piece of a canoe (probably a bark basket) and a spear and round the grave were several little baskets made of the fan-palm leaf, which, from their small size, we thought had been placed there by the children of the departed. Nothing could exceed the neatness of the whole; the sand and earth were cleared away from the sides and not a shrub or weed was suffered to grow within the area."²²

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I have quoted Sir Gordon Bremer's description in full because it shows that, even after a hundred and thirty years, the aborigines of Melville Island,

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²² Bremer, 1843. From this description it would appear that Bremer chanced to see a grave not long after the aborigines had completed the final rituals. Had any time elapsed the whole area would have been covered with grass and leaves, for, after the *pukamuni* ceremonies, nobody is interested in either the grave or the poles.

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[178] where they have not suffered from ecclesiastic prohibitions, are still using a similar form of grave and posts.

Major Campbell (1834, p. 158), writing of a grave he saw on Melville Island in 1826, states: "It (the grave) is surrounded by upright poles, many of which are formed at the top like lances and halberts, 14-15 feet high, and between these the spears and waddies (probably of the deceased) are stuck upright in the ground."

Brown (1905, p. 28) found a grave on Luxmore Head, in Apsley Straits surrounded . . . "by wooden slabs, portions of which had been burnt. Aboriginal markings were faintly discernible in places on the wood, some of the posts had the wood cut away from the outside toward the centre, leaving a short spike standing up in the middle of the post."

Klaatsch (1907, p. 257), in referring to the same burial poles at Luxmore Head, writes: "In some examples the slab was so carved that the upper part was only connected with the lower by two thin pillars or, on others, the top was mushroom-shaped."

"It is easy to see that the aborigines used fire for this work of sculpture, scratching the burnt part away with shell."

Basedow,⁹⁹ in 1911, came across a grave of an infant, on Bathurst Island, surrounded by five simply decorated posts, which had "been cut and carved with a sharp bladed instrument, in all probability a tomahawk."

Basedow persuaded the aborigines to renovate the designs, which did not vary greatly from those in use at the present day.

[114] Spencer,¹⁰⁰ in 1911, made sketches of many of the burial poles, and arranged for the aborigines to redecorate a group which was later displayed in the National Museum, Melbourne. He states (1928, p. 682) that: "It (the pole) [177] was slowly and laboriously cut with an iron tomahawk, but formerly with a sharp shell, until it has the form decided upon by the artificer."

Dr. Kenneth Fry, who visited Melville Island in 1913, was the first investigator to ascertain the meanings of a number of poles. These, with his permission, are illustrated on Fig. 8. All of these shapes, but two, are those still most commonly used among the hundred or more which I saw on Melville Island:

[115] An old aboriginal, *Tjamalampua*, told me that in *palaneri* times, i.e., a long while ago, before there were any steel axes, the aborigines used stone axes to fell the hollow trees for *pukamuni* poles. Although there were just as many poles around the grave as there are today, they were neither as

⁹⁹ Basedow (1913), p. 314, Fig. 4, Pls. 13, 14, 16, 17, 18.
¹⁰⁰ Spencer (1928), p. 682, Figs. 471-7, Pl. X.

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elaborately shaped nor decorated, often being covered with no more than a series of dots.¹

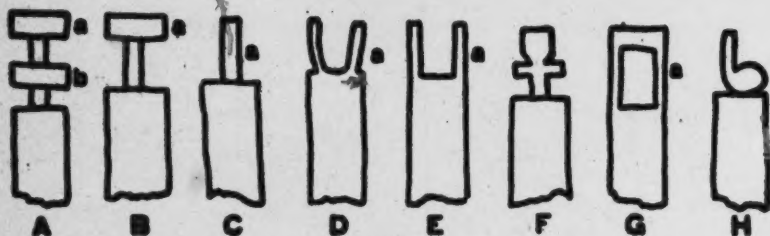
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FIG. 3. The Burial Poles

Origin of the Pukamuni Poles

At present we have no evidence to show whether the custom of erecting burial poles around the grave in such numbers, not as a memorial, but as a gift to the dead, is confined entirely to the Tiwi tribe, or whether it is used in any other part of the world, and has reached the Tiwi by diffusion. There certainly are no similar burial poles on the Australian continent.

In north-eastern Arnhem Land, some of the decorated log coffins are as high as seven feet.² But the function of those coffins bears no relationship to that of the burial poles of Melville Island, the former being no more than coffins to hold the bones, and the latter, gifts to please the spirit of the dead.

It is possible that, during the long period of isolation from the mainland cultures, the Melville Islanders may have changed coffins of north-eastern Arnhem Land into the burial poles of the Tiwi.

The only examples of burial posts outside of Australia known to me, that are in any way comparable in function to those on Melville Island, are the *malangan* burial ornaments of New Ireland described by Kramer.³

Methods of Manufacture

Although, at the conclusion of the *pukamuni* rituals, the grave is totally neglected and the poles allowed to decay, the "workers", using steel axes⁴

¹ Although *Tjamalangu* is not fully correct (see Bremer's and Campbell's statement in the early nineteenth century, pp. 107, 108), it indicates that both the poles and their painted decorations have, with the passing of the years, and the acquisition of steel tools, become more complex.

² Mountford, 1916, p. 317.

³ Kramer, 1931.

⁴ The evidence of Bremer, Spencer and the aborigines, suggests that before the advent of metal the only cutting tools owned by the aborigines would have been crude stone axes, and the shells of cockles. It is likely that, under these conditions, the poles would